

# THE NEW SUNSET PARK LIBRARY



REPORT PREPARED FOR:

**Bklyn**  
Public Library

PROJECT PARTNERS:

**HESTER ST**

Grain collective  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | URBAN DESIGN

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# INTRODUCTION

Brooklyn Public Library is redeveloping its Sunset Park branch to better meet the needs of the neighborhood. To ensure that the new branch best serves the needs of its users, the library engaged Sunset Park residents, organizations, policymakers, service providers, and other key stakeholders in a participatory design process. Residents shared their priorities and helped to shape the programs and design of the new Sunset Park Library. The library serves many needs in the community - both for its books, computers and multimedia and as a critical gathering space, social hub, and resource center.

**I'm excited about...**



Summer Programs for Kids

**in my new library!**

**I'm excited about...**



It will represent the future

**in my new library!**

**I'm excited about...**



the ~~new~~ new books, technology and the new appearance.

**in my new library!**

**I'm excited about...**



multilingual books

**in my new library!**

**I'm excited about...**



the much needed increase in SPACE

**in my new library!**

**I'm excited about...**



New space & technology to run more programs to help the community

**in my new library!**



# BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY'S SUNSET PARK BRANCH

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) and Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) partnered to redevelop Sunset Park Library. The goal is to meet the neighborhood's need for increased library space and programming, and, at the same time, to address the pressing need for affordable housing.

Sunset Park Library is one of Brooklyn's busiest libraries, ranked in the top 10 of BPL's 60 branches in attendance. The community of Sunset Park has far outgrown the 12,200 square foot library (only 7,500 square feet of which is publicly accessible). The building's infrastructure is woefully outdated with old computers, a defective elevator, and a defunct air conditioning system. To address these challenges, BPL transferred the site to FAC, who will develop 49 units of 100% permanently affordable housing atop a new, 21,000 square foot library branch. FAC will cover the cost of construction, and the City of New York will resume ownership of the library portion of the building.

FAC is a local non-profit that advances economic and social justice through community organizing, affordable housing development and workforce training. They've been serving South Brooklyn for the past 38-years.

The new library will occupy the cellar, first floor, and nearly half of the second floor of the new building. The remaining six and a half floors will be dedicated to affordable apartments. Half of the units will be reserved for CB 7 residents, 10% will preference city employees and seven units will preference disabled and/or hearing/visually impaired individuals.

During the engagement phase, conversations about the new library space and programming were largely joyful and engaging. Residents of varied ages and backgrounds provided input about the types of programs and services they rely on, and the expansions they would like to see in the new library. They also provided ideas about facilities and operations, universal needs, and the overall culture of the library.



## NYC PUBLIC LIBRARIES TODAY

While needs for library services are as high as ever across generations and neighborhoods, the New York City library system's physical infrastructure cannot keep up. The Center for an Urban Future, in a detailed 2014 report<sup>1</sup>, described branch libraries as "a critical part of New York City's human capital system, a go-to place for upgrading one's skills and a key platform for economic empowerment." Most of the city's library buildings, however, are stretched beyond their limits.

The average age of Brooklyn branches is 68 years and 17 branches are over a century old. In total, the city's three library systems have an estimated \$1.1 billion in capital needs. The report recommends a range of innovative financing and programming options, which include pairing affordable housing with branch libraries. With this new building, the Sunset Park community is addressing challenges that appear across the city.

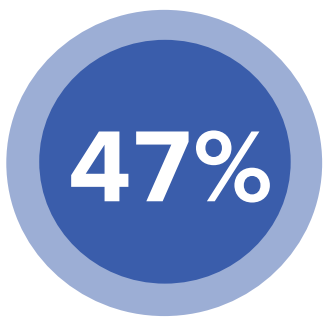
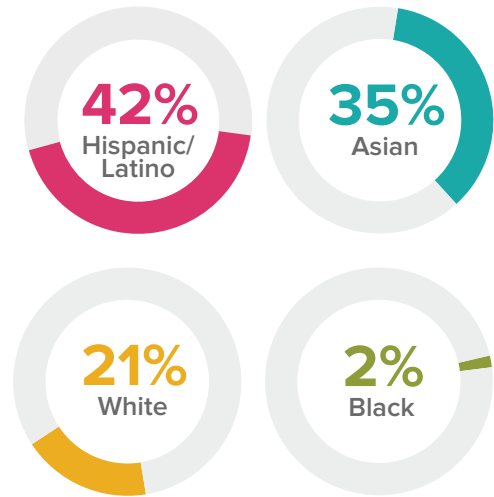
<sup>1</sup>Center for an Urban Future, "Re-envisioning New York's Branch Libraries," 2014. <https://nycfuture.org/research/re-envisioning-new-yorks-branch-libraries>



# NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

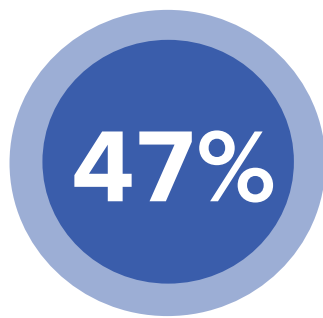
Sunset Park is a neighborhood in Southwest Brooklyn bordering Bay Ridge and Park Slope with a population of about 130,650.\* It is home primarily to Latino/Hispanic and Chinese residents with a growing concentration of families from Arab speaking countries. It is celebrated as one of Brooklyn’s most diverse neighborhoods with a vibrant history of immigrant populations moving to the area over the years. The neighborhood is part of Community Board 7, also serving Windsor Terrace. Sunset Park is comprised of a wide range of churches, schools, stores, restaurants, an industrial waterfront and the large, beautiful park for which the neighborhood is named. The Sunset Park Library serves as a hub for community members to connect and learn.

## RACE + ETHNICITY



**ARE FOREIGN BORN**

COMPARED TO 37% BOROUGH-WIDE



**HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

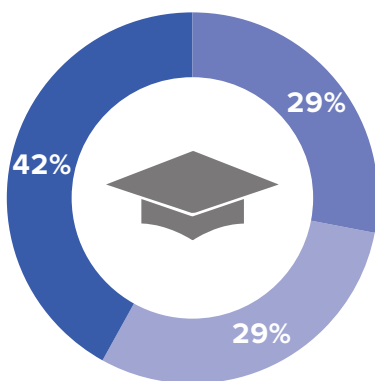
COMPARED TO 24% BOROUGH-WIDE



**\$37,828**

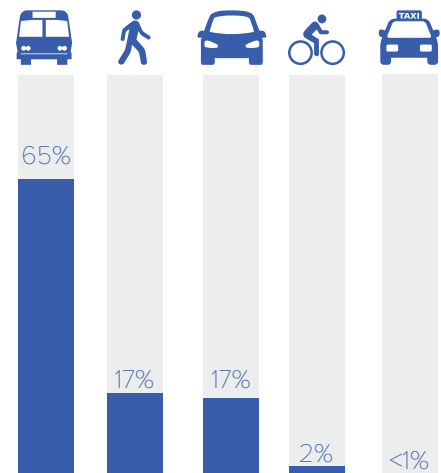
COMPARED TO \$48,201 BOROUGH-WIDE

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



- Less than high school  
*Compared to 21% borough-wide*
- High school graduate or some college  
*Compared to 46% borough-wide*
- College graduate  
*Compared to 33% borough-wide*

## TRAVEL TO WORK



\* population total accounts for zip codes 11221 and 11232

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 ACS 5-Year Estimates

# COMMUNITY DRIVEN DESIGN PROCESS

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Brooklyn Public Library began by asking: what do residents and other key stakeholders want in their new library? What are their priorities and what are their needs for space and programs? In partnership with BPL, Hester Street (HST) and Grain Collective (GC) engaged well over 350 residents, community groups, service providers, librarians, and elected officials between January and August 2017.

Stakeholders provided their feedback through interviews, surveys, focus groups and workshops. From the interviews to the focus groups to the workshops, each engagement activity built on the previous one to ensure continuity and depth of engagement. The map below highlights the different types of engagement activities across the neighborhood.



### STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

- Sunset Park Library
- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Center for Family Life
- Chinese American Planning Council NYC
- Center Against Domestic Violence
- Arab American Association of New York
- NYU Lutheran Family Health Center
- SBIDC
- Community Board 7
- Carlos Menchaca's Office
- Nydia Velasquez's office
- Felix Ortiz's Office

### FOCUS GROUPS

- Sunset Park Library
- Arab American Association of New York
- Center for Family Life



### TRAVEL SHOW

- Sunset Park Library
- Center for Family Life
- Chinese American Planning Council NYC
- Community Board 7
- Turning Point



### WORKSHOPS

- Sunset Park Library
- Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
- Sunset Park Recreation Center

## GOALS + PRINCIPLES

The overarching goal for the new Sunset Park library was to ensure meaningful, inclusive and expansive engagement that resulted in a community-driven design. More specifically, the engagement process aimed to:

- Creatively and effectively engage Sunset Park community-based organizations, residents, and other key stakeholders in the design and programming of the new Sunset Park library;
- Distill engagement feedback into programming, space layout, and adjacency recommendations; and
- Document engagement findings to inform future design and programming decisions.

Our work was guided by the following principles to ensure inclusive and expansive engagement that would result in clear recommendations about space, programs, and features:

- Creation and use of easily accessible graphic and visual tools for a variety of audiences;
- Transparency about project parameters, timeline, and opportunities for feedback;
- Responsive and iterative continuity throughout engagement process, and;
- Building relationships with diverse local partners to ensure engagement reflective of the community.

**“There are significant challenges due to limited space.”**

**- Sr Children’s Librarian**

## RESEARCH + DISCOVERY

Upon establishing goals and principles among project partners, Hester Street worked to understand the neighborhood context, stakeholders’ opinions about the development project, and the relationships between the library and local organizations, service providers, and local elected officials. We created an inventory of relevant development plans and projects in the neighborhood. We mapped neighborhood assets - schools, churches, community and senior centers. And we worked with BPL to identify a set of local partners who could support outreach, focus groups and provide overall feedback and guidance.

Prior to engaging with local partners, we wanted to better understand the current library’s constraints from the perspectives of the people who know the library best. We surveyed and interviewed librarians to better understand: their daily tasks, the challenges they face in the current building, and their priorities for the new library.

## SURVEYS

Librarians and patrons completed in-person and online surveys to help inform and prioritize library needs. A majority of participants completed online surveys at the library itself, which highlights a lack of computer and internet access in the neighborhood.

### SURVEY TAKEAWAYS

People want:

- More frequently offered programs, such as technology tutorials and arts & crafts
- Separate children, adult, and teen spaces
- Artwork displayed by local artists
- Career center
- Cafe
- More places to sit



## ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

- **200** surveys from library patrons and staff
- **13** stakeholder meetings
- **4** focus groups
- **2** large public workshops (in four languages)
- Informal patron conversations along major corridors in Sunset Park

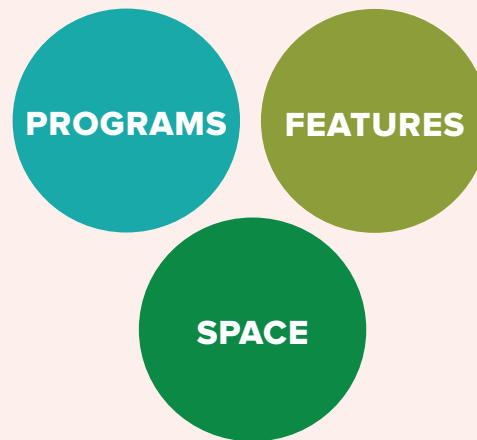
Engagement initially focused on both the design of the new space and the programming within Sunset Park's new library, but spatial and programmatic features such as more bathrooms and staff diversity quickly emerged as a third priority area.

## OVERVIEW

### WORKSHOPS



### PRIORITY AREAS



### SURVEYS

**198**  
RESPONDENTS\*

\*Spanish, Chinese, English combined

### LOCAL PARTNERS

- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Center for Family Life/SCO
- Chinese American Planning Council-NYC
- Council Member Carlos Menchaca's Office
- Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez's Office
- Center Against Domestic Violence
- NYU Lutheran Family Health Centers
- Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation
- Community Board 7
- Assemblyman Felix Ortiz
- Arab American Association - NY

# WORKSHOPS

At the center of the process were two large public workshops to engage a broad swath of the Sunset Park community.

Participants in each workshop engaged in activities to help inform BPL about what programs and features community members most wanted and where they wanted to see them within the new library.

## WORKSHOP 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The surveys and stakeholder interviews helped shape the first workshop. As participants walked in, they were encouraged to review and engage with informational boards that focused on the development project, including the new branch, the affordable housing and their interim library. A community map asked them to label where they live or work. Participants shared what they loved at the current library, what needed improvement, and their priorities for programs and services, space, and features in the new library.

### Activity 1: CURRENT SPACE



#### WHAT WE'VE HEARD...

IS LOVED & NEEDED MORE		NEEDS TO CHANGE	
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES	COMPUTER & INTERNET ACCESS	NOISY, OVERCROWDED & TOO HOT DURING THE SUMMER	LACK OF DESIGNATED SPACE FOR AGE-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES
COMMUNITY MEETING ROOMS	WORKSHOPS	LACK OF ADEQUATE SUPPORT IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES	LACK OF COMMUNICATION ABOUT LIBRARY PROGRAMS
WHAT ELSE?		WHAT ELSE?	

### Activity 2: NEW SPACE



#### THE LIBRARY WILL DOUBLE IN SIZE.

Help us design the new library! Tell us what your priorities are for the programs, space and other special features.



PROGRAMS / SERVICES	SPACE	FEATURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After-school programs</li> <li>Community meeting rooms</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Computer &amp; internet access</li> <li>Language classes</li> <li>Community art projects</li> <li>Temporary gallery</li> <li>Performance space</li> <li>Storage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open-plan layout</li> <li>Green walls</li> <li>Indoor plants</li> <li>Seating</li> <li>Storage</li> <li>Accessibility</li> <li>Lighting</li> <li>Acoustics</li> <li>Temperature control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Computers</li> <li>Internet</li> <li>Language resources</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Community art projects</li> <li>Temporary gallery</li> <li>Performance space</li> <li>Storage</li> </ul>
ANYTHING ELSE?	ANYTHING ELSE?	ANYTHING ELSE?

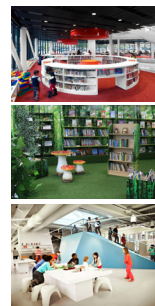
## WORKSHOP 2: LIBRARY DESIGN

The second workshop aimed to reiterate and confirm what was shared in the preceding engagement and understand how residents visualized the design of the building. Participants were asked to verify their space and programming priorities. A collage activity showing a library's children, teen, adult, reception, and media spaces served to inform the design of the new space. Special guests Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and Council Member Carlos Menchaca attended and made remarks.

### COLLAGE ACTIVITY



#### CHILDREN'S SPACE 儿童区域 عائلة ESPACIO PARA NIÑOS



### PROGRAM SURVEY



For each program area, review the listed features with your group. Do you agree? Add anything that's missing on the blank rectangle.

Para cada área de programación, revisa la lista de características con tu grupo. ¿Estás de acuerdo? Añade lo que falte dentro del rectángulo en blanco.

TEEN SPACE ESPACIO JUVENIL	RECEPTION / ENTRANCE / EXHIBITION / CULTURAL RECEPCIÓN / ENTRADA / EXHIBICIÓN / CULTURAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS / PROGRAMAS DE DESPUÉS DE ESCUELA</li> <li>COMPUTERS / COMPUTADORES</li> <li>INDEPENDENT WORK STATIONS / ESTACIONES DE TRABAJO INDEPENDIENTES</li> <li>SMALL GROUP STUDYING / ESTUDIO GRUPAL PARA UNO O DOS</li> <li>CHARGING STATION / ESTACION DE CARGA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REFERENCE / SERVICIO DE REFERENCIA</li> <li>MULTILINGUAL RESOURCES / RECURSOS MULTILINGÜES</li> <li>TEMPORARY GALLERY / GALERÍA TEMPORAL</li> <li>PERFORMANCE SPACE / ESPACIO DE REPRESENTACIÓN</li> </ul>
<p>AGREE? / ¿DE ACUERDO?</p> <p>ANYTHING ELSE? / ¿ALGO MÁS?</p>	<p>AGREE? / ¿DE ACUERDO?</p> <p>ANYTHING ELSE? / ¿ALGO MÁS?</p>

## FOCUS GROUPS

In an effort to maximize opportunities for engagement from as many people in the neighborhood as possible, we coordinated three focus groups following the workshops. Focus groups aimed to engage people less likely to attend large workshops.

Focus groups were held at the Sunset Park Library, Arab American Association, and the Center for Family Life Youth Summer Program in Sunset Park High School. We worked with staff from each organization to reach a diverse array of community members. Participants shared their ideas for features and programs through a survey and collage activity.

Although focus group participants shared many of the same priorities as workshop participants, new priorities arose. For example, women at the Arab American Association shared a need for a non denominational prayer room, and parents at La Hora Magica requested a lactation room.

Each focus group was held during or after scheduled programming at each site to increase the convenience of participation.

- English and Spanish speaking Sunset Park Library mothers and young children shared ideas for the children's area of the new space after Story Play and La Hora Magica at Sunset Park Library.
- Women from AAANY's Women's Program provided feedback and were later joined by other members of the organization. Their recommendations focused on the reception and children's area of the new library.
- Sunset Park High School students involved in the CFL Summer Youth Program shared their ideas during a collage activity depicting the library's teen & media sections.





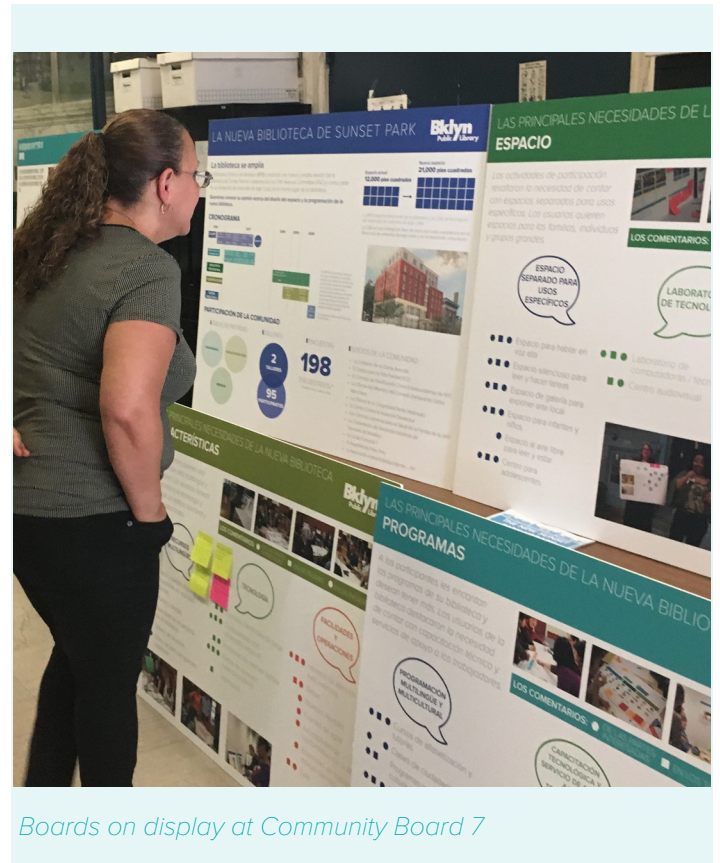
# TRAVELING BOARDS

Incorporating community feedback on space, programs, and features, we pulled out recommendations and major themes to share back with residents, local partners, and other key stakeholders.

Boards with information about the project and community priorities for space, programs, and features traveled the neighborhood. The traveling boards provided stakeholders unable to attend the community report back meeting an opportunity to get an update on the process and weigh in on the findings.

The boards visited the following locations:

- Center for Family Life /SCO
- Chinese American Planning Council
- Community Board 7
- Turning Point Brooklyn
- Sunset Park Library



Boards on display at Community Board 7

Traveling Boards were available in all four languages.

The image shows four panels of traveling boards, each in a different language. From left to right: English, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. Each panel contains information about the new library project, including community needs, program requirements, and space preferences. The boards are designed to be interactive and informative for the community.



# ANALYSIS + RECOMMENDATIONS

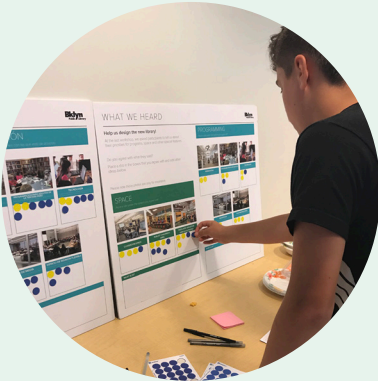
## FINDINGS

Following all of the major engagement activities, we collected and analyzed participant feedback to craft recommendations that spoke to the three priority areas across the engagement process. Overall, stakeholders expressed: (1) a need for space separation for various uses and programming; (2) comprehensive technology access, and; (3) a welcoming and multicultural library in staffing, services, programs, amenities, and overall design.





## SPACE



- Space separation for specific program/function uses to address a variety of needs
- A gallery space that celebrates local cultural diversity and local artists
- A robust computer and technology lab that can serve group and individual programming and services
- Free meeting and classroom space for organizations and individuals and a large flexible performance space
- Large flexible performance space

## FEATURES



- Even more multilingual resources and technology access to complement the growing and diverse community needs
- Books and media available in multiple languages; newspapers and magazines; a community bulletin board; computers
- Flexible business hours
- ADA accessibility
- More restrooms (including family restrooms) and drinking water fountains that encourage re-usable bottles
- Free Wi-Fi capabilities in and around the new library to address the overall lack of internet access and computer use in Sunset Park

## PROGRAMS

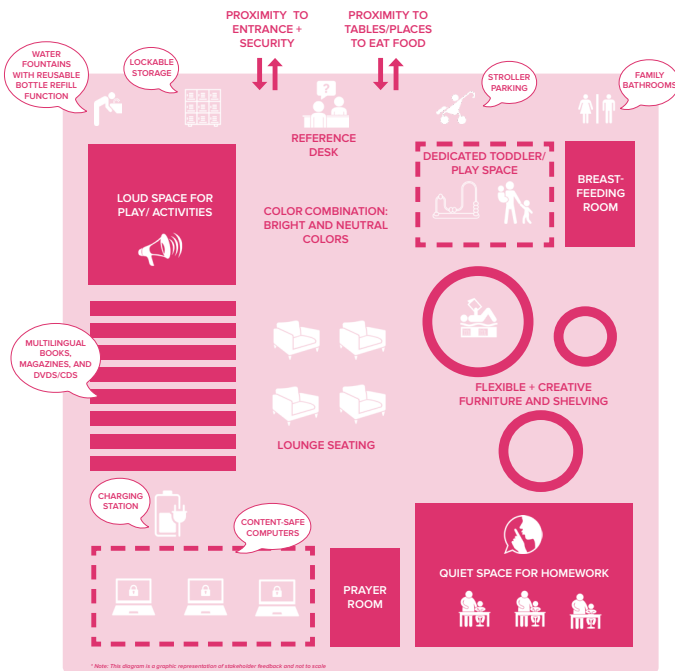


- An even more comprehensive multicultural and multilingual library in its programming, services, staffing, wayfinding, and overall design
- Expansion of existing beloved programs and services, such as weekend and family programming, ESL classes, citizenship prep, and homework help
- Innovative programs and services, such as introduction to library services training, computer and internet training, yoga for children and youth, and arts and culture programming for all ages
- Collaboration with local organizations and/or city agencies to provide job and technical training and resources for a variety of ages

# COLLAGE ACTIVITY FINDINGS

## CHILDREN'S SPACE ESPACIO PARA NIÑOS

儿童区域  
مساحة الأطفال



### PROGRAMMING

-  INDIVIDUAL + GROUP ACTIVITIES (TABLETS, BOARD GAMES, ETC.)
-  HOMEWORK HELP + TUTORING
-  WRITING PROGRAM
-  MULTILINGUAL STORYTIME AND OTHER FAMILY ACTIVITIES ON WEEKENDS
-  ART ACTIVITIES
-  YOGA

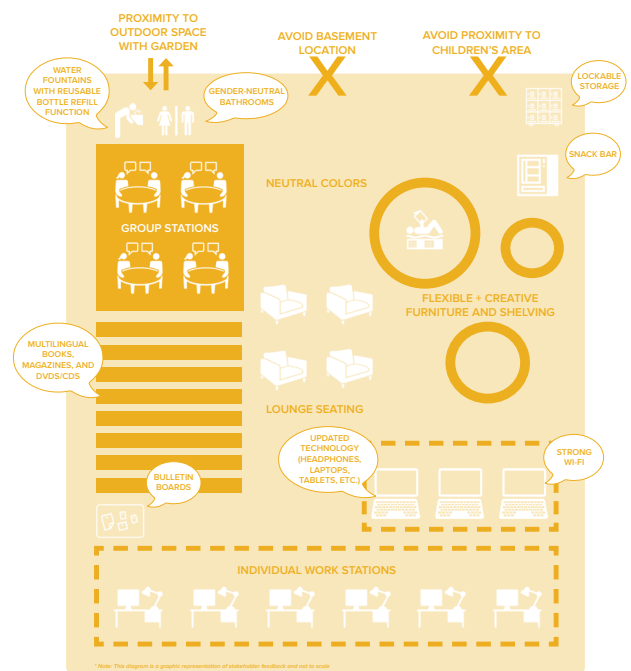
## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Since many of the library users are children and families, participants repeatedly brought up expanding the children's space.

Participants in the second workshop and two of the focus groups created the children's space collage. Their priorities included: security, tables/places to eat food, loud space for play & activities, and a dedicated toddler/play space. While BPL has a no-food policy, they acknowledge the need to explore that further.

## TEEN SPACE ESPACIO JUVENIL

青少年区  
مساحة المراهقين



### PROGRAMMING

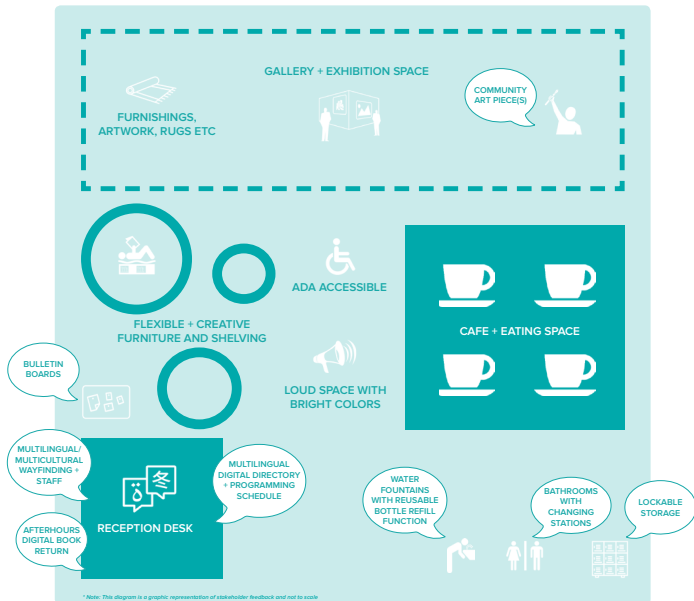
-  AFTERSCHOOL HOMEWORK HELP
-  COMPUTER TRAINING + LOANS
-  ARTS + CULTURE PROGRAMMING
-  RESEARCH ASSISTANCE
-  TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOPS + TRAININGS

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The library currently has a small children's space, but no location dedicated to teens. Sunset Park High School students involved in the CFL Youth Program voiced their needs in an all-teen focus group.

Their needs included a location with natural light and away from the children's area. They advocated for gender neutral bathrooms, updated technology, individual workstations, and multilingual resources, among other ideas.

## ENTRANCE/RECEPTION 接待 / 入口 RECEPCIÓN/ ENTRADA الاستقبال / الدخول



### PROGRAMMING

MULTILINGUAL LIBRARY SERVICES, PRACTICES + NORMS TRAINING FOR NEW PATRONS

ARTS + CULTURE PROGRAMMING

PRESENTATIONS

PROGRAMMING FOR OLDER ADULTS IN A VARIETY OF LANGUAGES

MULTILINGUAL REFERENCE DESK

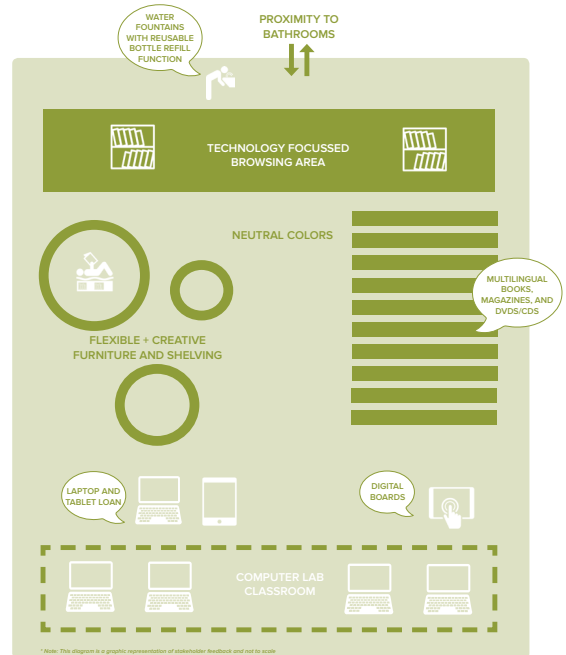
DANCE + THEATRE PERFORMANCES

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Attendees of the second workshop and two focus groups also provided input on the features and programming of the reception area. Participants requested a cafe + eating space, multilingual resources and water fountains that encourage the use of reusable bottles.

To celebrate and recognize the Sunset Park's diversity, residents request gallery or exhibition space with local art as well as ADA accessibility features.

## MEDIA CENTER 媒体中心 CENTRO DE MEDIOS مركز الوسائط



### PROGRAMMING

BASIC COMPUTER + INTERNET TRAINING

INTERMEDIATE COMPUTER/INTERNET SOFTWARE + TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Some adults and older children visit the library primarily to use the computers. All participants mentioned a need for updated computers and more technology in general.

During the collage activity, participants prioritized the ability to borrow laptops and tablets. They also expressed the need for a computer lab classroom and a technology focused browsing area. Participants also mentioned a need for basic computer and software training.





Mother and her children explore feedback boards.

Sunset Park residents ask questions about next steps.



Women review the affordable housing information.



# LESSONS LEARNED

## WHAT WORKED

The participants of the various engagement activities for the new Sunset Park library reflected the neighborhood's rich diversity. Regular library patrons and others less familiar with the current branch's offerings found accessible opportunities to contribute their ideas.

The variety of engagement activities and methods ensured that as many stakeholders as possible were able to help inform the design and programming of the new library. In particular, the focus groups that followed workshops enabled us to hear from stakeholders within their comfort zones. For example, we met with the CFL/SCO summer youth program participants and the Arab American Association membership in their usual meeting spaces.

Both large workshops were held in four languages, where participants speaking Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic were able to receive information and provide feedback. Beautifully designed, brightly colored workshop materials were accessible to participants of all ages and backgrounds. The inviting and multilingual materials and discussions were highlights of the process. The discussions were designed to encourage families and individuals alike to participate.

Food, supervised children's activities, and free giveaways at key workshops and meetings also incentivized residents of all backgrounds to willingly and joyfully provide their perspectives and priorities on the new and interim libraries. The back-to-school raffle of brand new backpacks (each filled with pencils, pens, a notebook, and a book) was an exciting way to end the final workshop. Even participants without children waited eagerly for each backpack to find its owner. Overall, the engagement process resulted in comprehensive recommendations for the new library.

## CHALLENGES

While the process was successful overall, there were a few challenges. The coordination for the traveling boards took longer than anticipated, so there was no time to announce the schedule, leaving the engagement with boards at selected locations to chance.

Securing locations for engagement across diverse areas of the Sunset Park neighborhood was also challenging. The first workshop took place at the local library branch and brought more than 70 participants. However, the overall need for more space in the new library was utterly clear as participants struggled to shuffle through the tight space.

In an effort to ensure more Chinese immigrant families participated, the second workshop took place at a school gym closer to avenues where more Asian families live. While the location successfully brought a larger number of Chinese speakers to the meeting, the overall attendance for that workshop was just over 25 participants.

While all stakeholders are excited about their new library, concerns about other neighborhood needs, such as housing, emerged at all workshops.



*Free backpack raffle brings many smiles.*

# CONCLUSION

At the community report back meeting, BPL stated that the conversation about the programming, design, and spatial layout of the new library was not over. BPL has committed to sharing the recommendations on space, programs, features and adjacencies of select program spaces to the future architect of the new library. BPL will continue to engage the public on both the interim and the new library projects.



## MAJOR THEMES

- 1. Participants love the programs in their library and want to see more of them. Patrons pointed to a need for technical training and workforce services.**
- 2. There is a pressing need for separation of space for specific uses. Participants want spaces for families, individuals, and large groups.**
- 3. Stakeholders want an even more multilingual + multicultural library. Patrons want a functional building that is accessible to all.**

Small group discussion at second workshop.



Report back at second workshop.



AAA members prioritize space needs at focus group.

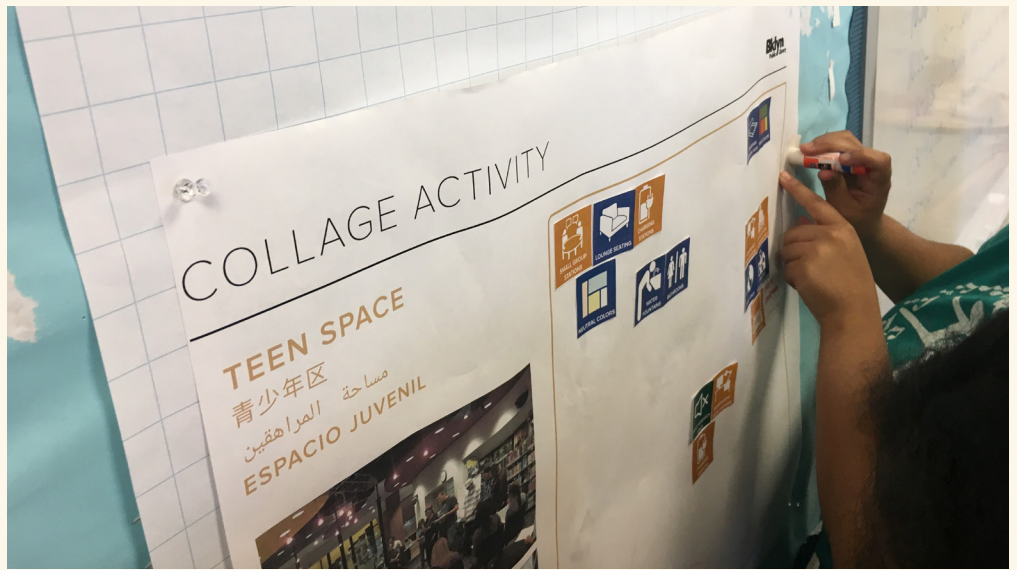






Participants engage with boards at first workshop.

Close up of youth focus group collage activity



BPL provides information on next steps for overall project.



